



News Release

For immediate release: December 17, 2014

(14-184)

Contacts: [Marqise Allen](#), Communications Office
[Kelly Stowe](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

360-236-4022

Flu vaccination can protect you during the holiday family gathering season

Early medications for flu are important in those at high risk for complications

OLYMPIA — Fall and winter usher in holiday travel and gatherings that create an opportunity for flu and other viruses to spread. There's still time to get vaccinated to help avoid getting the flu while spending time with loved ones and friends this holiday season.

Flu activity is increasing in Washington and is expected to continue to increase in the coming weeks. Flu season typically peaks in the winter months when people spend more time indoors. So far this season, H3N2 flu viruses have been the most common type of flu circulating around the country. More than half of those viruses have changed slightly from the strain that's included in this year's flu vaccine. Seasons when H3N2 viruses are most common tend to be more severe with higher numbers of hospitalizations and deaths. The flu vaccine still offers protection against the well-matched strains and may provide some protection against the drifted strain.

"We are still recommending that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated this season," said State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy. "Even if the vaccine may only provide partial protection against one flu virus, it can protect you against the other types."

The Department of Health is running [statewide flu vaccine ads featuring Washington families](#) and Secretary of Health John Wiesman to raise awareness about preventing the flu.

Everyone six months and older should get vaccinated. It's especially important for people at higher risk for flu-related complications. People at higher risk include young children, pregnant women, people 65 and older, and people with certain chronic medical conditions. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to fully protect against flu. Some children under nine may need two doses of flu vaccine.

People at high-risk who get the flu may develop serious complications, such as pneumonia; flu can make existing health conditions worse. This can lead to hospitalization and death. If you're at increased risk for complications and have flu symptoms, contact your doctor or clinic right away. Antiviral medications help, but they must be prescribed by a doctor and are most effective when started within 48 hours of illness onset.

There are many vaccine choices this season, offered in multiple locations, including health care provider offices, pharmacies, and even through some employers. The [online "vaccine finder"](#) is a good tool for finding vaccine near you, or call the [local health department](#) in your area. People can also find a clinic by calling the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

The state health department buys all recommended [childhood vaccines](#), including flu vaccine, for kids through age 18. Although the vaccine is provided at no cost, health care providers may charge for the office visit or include a fee to give the vaccine. The health care provider may waive the fee if you ask.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

###